DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 889 CE 060 391

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TITLE Exemplary Vocational Education Programs Serving Postsecondary Special Needs Populations.
PUB DATE Dec 91
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention (Los Angeles, CA, December 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Demonstration Programs; *Evaluation Criteria; *Models; Postsecondary Education; Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; *Special Needs Students; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Technical Assistance for Special Populations Prog

ABSTRACT

In 1989, the Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program (TASPP) developed a process to identify exemplary vocational education programs serving youth and adults with special needs. A national survey was conducted, with responses received from more than 350 professional vocational educators of special needs students in several states. In order to determine the programmatic components and criteria they believed should be used in identifying exemplary programs, respondents were given an array of diverse program and instructional strategies from which to choose, and they were asked to list additional relevant criteria. Respondents favored collecting and analyzing evidence on the implementation and effects of programs significantly more than soliciting nominations from knowledgeable leaders within the field. The self-nomination process used by TASPP to identify exemplary programs focuses on obtaining detailed descriptions of programs based on 20 components that constitute exemplary programs. The components were identified based on an extensive literature review. Once TASPP receives an exemplary program application through the process, the application is reviewed by three recognized leaders in the field using general criteria and the 20 components. Those programs receiving outstanding ratings from this review process are designated as exemplary by TASPP. (Brief description of four programs identified as models by the TASPP process during 1990 are included. The descriptions include outcome information, location, and target populations served.) (KC)

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EXEMPLARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS SERVING POSTSECONDARY SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS

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BACKGROUND

A popular means of program improvement amongst practitioners is learning from the successes - and failures - of programs similar to theirs. A recent survey conducted by the Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program (TASPP) (Burac & Maddy-Bernstein, 1990) and a 1987 project conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Repetto, Phelps, & Markward, 1987) substantiate interest in exemplary programs and practices. Furthermore, TASPP staff have noted that information on exemplary programs is frequently requested by workshop and conference participants and through information requests received at the TASPP office. The need to recognize and disseminate information on exemplary vocational education programs is further given emphasis in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990. The Act authorizes the Secretary of Education to carry out programs to recognize excellent and high quality vocational education programs and name them Blue Ribbon Vocational Education Programs. The Act further mandates that these programs should emphasize the strengthening of the participation of individuals who are members of special populations (AVA, 1990). Programs are required to increase access, improve services, and show high-quality outcomes for individuals from special populations. State and local personnel can maximize their effectiveness in meeting these mandates by adopting or adapting practices which have been proven effective.

For the past two decades, federal vocational education legislation has provided funding of programs and support services designed to enhance the participation of students with special needs in secondary and postsecondary level vocational education programs. While numerous programmatic approaches have

been attempted, few have been systematically evaluated. Most of the studies of exemplary vocational education programs serving students with special needs have focused on serving one particular group of students (e.g., the handicapped). Furthermore, exemplary program studies have often been solely descriptive, and have seldom examined the relationships between program components and the outcomes attained by program participants and completers.

THE RESEARCH

During 1989, a major activity of TASPP was to develop a process for identifying exemplary vocational education programs serving youth and adults with special needs. A national survey conducted by Thomas Wermuth and L. Allen Phelps included responses from over 350 professionals in several states working in the area of vocational education programs serving students with special needs. In order to determine the programmatic components and criteria they believed should be used in identifying exemplary programs, respondents were given an array of diverse program and instructional strategies currently in use to choose from, and were to list additional relevant criteria.

In choosing between two general approaches for identifying effective programs, respondents favored collecting and analyzing evidence on the implementation and effects of programs significantly more than soliciting nominations from knowledgeable leaders within the field. This stated preference for an analytical, evaluative process constitutes a call for change in this area. To date, most effective program studies have used a nomination strategy to identify and select exemplary programs. The TASPP search used a self-nomination strategy requiring submission of a comprehensive application that included

detailed information and documentation that verified specific outcomes obtained by program participants and completers.

The self-nomination process used by TASPP to identify exemplary programs focuses on obtaining detailed descriptions of programs based on twenty components identified by Wermuth and Phelps (in process) that constitute exemplary vocational education programs serving students with special needs. Those components were developed based on an extensive review and content analysis literature from the following sources:

1. a National Center survey of professionals working in the area of vocational education programs serving students with special needs
2. research studies of effective vocational education programs serving students with special needs
3. studies by state departments of education on best practices
4. literature on effective instruction
5. legislation
6. textbooks

Once a detailed program description is obtained through the TASPP exemplary program application process, the application is reviewed and evaluated by three recognized leaders in the field of vocational education for students with special needs. Criteria for rating the programs included:

A. General Information - basic program information

B. Demographic Information - objective description of program, including setting, number and population served, staffing requirements, financial information, and outcome data

C. Program Information - abstract, history, and program operation

D. Components of Exemplary Vocational Education Programs

   1. Strong Administrative Leadership and Support

2. Sufficient Financial Support
3. Staff Development
4. Formative Program Evaluation
5. Summative Program Evaluation
6. Individualized Curriculum Modifications
7. Integration of Academic and Vocational Curricula
8. Appropriate Instructional Settings
9. Cooperative Learning Experiences
10. Assessment of Individual's Vocational Interests and Abilities
11. Instructional Support Services
12. On-Going Career Guidance and Counseling
13. Family/Parental Involvement and Support
14. Notification of Both Students and Parents Regarding Vocational Opportunities
15. Vocational Educators Involvement in Individualized Educational Planning
16. Formalized Transition Planning
17. Intra and Interagency Collaboration
18. Work Experience Opportunities
19. Job Placement Services
20. Follow-Up of Graduates and Non-Graduates

Those programs receiving outstanding ratings from the review process are designated as exemplary by TASPP. Information on these identified exemplary programs are entered into TASPP's computerized information base. It is hoped that the programs recognized can serve as: (a) model programs for administrators and practitioners to replicate or use during evaluations; and (b) a method to strengthen inservice and preservice teacher education preparation. The framework can serve as: (a) guide for further research; and (b) criteria for

state and local personnel to plan new programs. To date, the States of California and New Jersey have adopted this framework for identifying model programs in their states. A California Department of Education publication entitled *Promising Practices for Special Needs Youth in Career-Vocational Education* identifies programs in California offering promising practices in career-vocational education. Feedback from coordinators of exemplary programs reveal that as a result of TASPP announcements they have received numerous requests from practitioners nationwide (a) for more information regarding their program, (b) to visit site and observe the program in operation, and (c) for assistance in setting up programs. Furthermore, TASPP staff regularly receive requests for information about exemplary programs, including descriptions, program design, assessment procedure, and contact information.

EXEMPLARY POSTSECONDARY PROGRAMS

During 1990, two of five exemplary programs chosen were postsecondary programs. A third program operated in a secondary setting but served college age students who have not finished high school. In 1991, one postsecondary program was selected as exemplary. A brief description, including outcome information, location, and target populations of these four programs are presented in this article.

Program Title: COMPUTER PROGRAMMER TRAINING FOR THE DISABLED
Valencia Community College
Orlando, Florida

Populations Served: Individuals with Severe Disabilities

The Valencia Community College *Computer Programmer Training for the Disabled Program* (CPTD) serves students who have severe disabilities (primarily physical), through a partnership with JTPA, Vocational Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and local business leaders. The CPTD graduate placement rate of 99% and average starting pay of $24,000 annually are indicators of the program's great success.

The eleven-month CPTD Program includes nine months of classroom instruction utilizing an integrated academic "technical" curriculum and a "professional socialization" curriculum and two months on-the-job-training. The academic "technical" curriculum provides the students training on a variety of computer programming concepts and programming languages. At regular intervals, community management-level professionals in data processing and human resources volunteer their time to evaluate the participants' progress in intensive hour-and-a-half sessions. The "professional socialization" segment of the curriculum includes appropriate ways to talk, dress, and generally conduct oneself in the business world, including writing a resume and good interview techniques. Students must dress and conduct themselves in appropriate business fashion during the entire program.

Program Title: LEARNING LAB FOR TECHNOLOGY AND APPLIED SCIENCES
Santa Fe Community College
Gainesville, Florida

Populations Served: Academically Disadvantaged and Limited English Proficient Students

The *Learning Lab for Technology and Applied Sciences* is the unique provider of academic support services for Santa Fe Community College vocational students. The lab is also the heart of a network which draws together college and community resources to offer the entire range of support services necessary for students with special learning needs. The goal of the program is to develop student potential through a comprehensive system of outreach, assessment, advisement, and instruction. During the 1988-89 academic year, the lab served 1,534 students with special needs, 75% of whom either graduated or continued their education.

The program strives to eliminate gaps between students' skills and the requirements of the vocational-technical programs. Upon entry into a vocational program, students' skills are assessed, a diagnosis made, and appropriate remediation initiated. The diagnosis, or academic prescription, is tailored to individual needs and may include the development of reading, writing, mathematics, science, critical thinking, study and employment skills, and/or the development of language and cultural adaptation skill. Students are served in either individual or small-group instructional settings in a nurturing environment.

The college, a designated area vocational-technical center, offers vocational supplemental courses and approximately 62 programs leading to the Associate of Science degree or a non-credit certificate.

Program Title: BOULDER VALLEY TEEN PARENTING PROGRAM
Boulder Valley Public Schools
Boulder, Colorado

Populations Served: Teen Parents or Expecting Teen Parents

It is the goal of *The Boulder Valley Teen Parenting Program* that every school-age parent, both teen mothers and fathers, have the opportunity to continue high school courses leading to graduation and acquire job skills for economic self-sufficiency. In meeting this goal, the administration and staff have enlisted the aid of numerous community agencies, obtained grants, and diligently built a program that strives to meet the educational, social, emotional, and physical needs of those enrolled.

Beginning in 1980 with one student and one baby, the program has grown to serving 65 parents, 36 toddlers, and 16 infants during the 1988-89 school year. The program's teen parents are offered an array of programs and services to help them attain their educational goals. In addition to the regular programs provided in the school district, teen parents also have the benefit of health care services, including pre- and post-natal services, support service (e.g., school bus transportation for them and their children), academic support services such as tutoring and basic skill instruction, and vocational training/employment services including assessment. Students have access to the Boulder Valley Area Technical Education Center's vocational programs and Job Placement Counselor as well as the option of preparing for the General Education Diploma (GED). An infant and toddler nursery also exist for the children of teen parents in the program.

The Teen Parenting Program successes are many: only 2% of the program's teen parents have children with low birth rate, less than 5% have another child while in their teens, an average of 85% of the teen parents have

completed school or received their GED compared to a national drop out rate of 50%-60% for their group.

Program Title: SINGLE PARENT/DISPLACED HOMEMAKER PROGRAM
Pinellas Technical Education Center
Clearwater and St. Petersburg Campuses
Florida

Populations Served: Single Parents and Displaced Homemakers

The *Pinellas County Single Parent/Displaced Homemaker Program* serves mostly women who are single, separated, divorced, and widowed, and in need of training in basic skills, GED preparation, and financial assistance. To help participants raise their standard of living, they are encouraged to enroll in technical training programs that will provide a higher-than-average wage and the potential for advancement. Operated by a guidance/vocational counselor and an occupational specialist with the support of staff from Pinellas Technical Education Center, the program offers career information and counseling, appropriate preparatory courses, and job placement services. In addition, support services provided include child care funding, gasoline allowances, bus passes, tutorial assistance, and school supplies.

Since its inception in 1986, the program has served 1,500 single parents and displaced homemakers. During 1989-1990, the program placed at least 87% of its graduates in high wage jobs.

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